

WASHINGTON, DC - Today Rep. Pete Stark introduced the End Stage Renal Disease Quality Improvement Act (ESRD). This legislation addresses deficiencies in the delivery of dialysis treatment for those suffering from End Stage Renal Disease, a chronic kidney disorder suffered by a growing number of Americans.

Those suffering with End Stage Renal Disease have lost full kidney function and must undergo a transplant or weekly dialysis to survive. 340,000 Americans suffering from ESRD receive dialysis. For the past 30 years, Medicare has funded dialysis therapy for a majority of ESRD patients due to the high cost of treatment.

"I have worked hard to assure quality care for ESRD patients throughout my tenure in Congress," Stark said. "I believe we have a unique responsibility to help those suffering from this disease since a disproportionate number of these patients aren't able to afford the treatment necessary for survival. As the dominant purchaser of dialysis services, the Medicare Program must end practices that harm ESRD patients."

There is alarming evidence that substandard care is being delivered at some Medicare funded sites.

- \* In 2000, the Inspector General noted numerous instances of substandard care and a fragmented oversight system that lacks adequate accountability.

- \* The GAO reported that only 1 in 9 dialysis facilities underwent an unannounced inspection in 1999.

- \* In 1998, the GAO found that almost 1 in 2 dialysis facilities had not been inspected within three years.

- \* A February 2002 Arizona Republic expose uncovered the alarming fact that many patients receive treatment under unsafe conditions. The Arizona Republic story included reports of patients receiving therapy in unsanitary facilities and receiving treatment from a nursing staff with little or no training. There were instances reported where dialysis machines were operated incorrectly, quality controls weren't followed, and required documentation was not filled out.

Currently, there are only minimal ESRD quality requirements in law. The Center on Medicare and Medicaid Services is moving forward with quality improvements for ESRD patients. Rep. Stark's legislation builds on those efforts. It holds dialysis facilities accountable for quality treatment by formalizing in law a quality improvement program to enforce standards under Medicare that ensure improved health outcomes for ESRD patients.

"By enacting this bill, Congress will send a strong message to ESRD patients that they are a top priority," Stark said. "It says to dialysis providers and ESRD program administrators that quality care for these Americans is a matter of life and death and Congress demands the best possible care."

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